

Guerrilleros

Spanish Antifascists in the
Resistance in France 1939-46

by
Steve Cushion



SOCIALIST HISTORY SOCIETY

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Spanish Antifascists in the Resistance - France 1939-46

Introduction

There were many different nationalities of antifascists fighting the Nazis and their French collaborators in occupied France. They were clearly allied, but the relationship was not without tensions and each group, as well as the common hatred of fascism, had their own agenda. Yiddish speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe were also fighting antisemitism and genocide, Italians, Austrians and Germans were struggling to regain their homeland from nazi-fascist dictatorships, the Poles were immigrants from a country under German occupation and the Russians were escaped prisoners of war who had been used as forced labourers, many of whom considered themselves to be operating as part of the Red Army behind enemy lines. The largest group were the Spanish refugees who had fled to France following the defeat of the Republic by the Nationalist forces led by Francisco Franco. Ten thousand Spanish Republicans fought in their own guerrilla brigades, many thousands more volunteered for mixed groupings of the various units of the French Resistance, others joined the Free French Army in exile or the Foreign Legion. The first unit of General Leclerc's armoured division to enter Paris, was composed largely of Spanish Republican veterans.¹ In many ways, these Spanish antifascists came to see the Second World War as a continuation of the struggle they had started in 1936 and many dreamed of returning across the Pyrenees to resume the struggle against the dictatorship in Spain. Robert Gildea argues that *The Resistance in France* is a better term than *The French Resistance*.²

These diverse motivations did not prevent the various nationalities from collaborating and fighting effectively alongside one another, but the differences need to be borne in mind when trying to understand the relationships between the different groups. It also affects the way we view the French Resistance, so perhaps a better title for this publication would be *Spanish Antifascists in France during the Second World War*.

Indeed, veterans of the Spanish Civil War of all nationalities were to play a vital role in organising armed resistance to the German occupation of France. At the introduction, in 1942, of the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO, Obligatory Work Service), the compulsory enlistment and deportation of hundreds of thousands of French workers to Germany to work as forced labour for the German war effort, thousands of young men fled into the hills and took to the guerrilla formations known as the *Maquis*.³ Spanish war veterans were crucial to the organisation and training of these young volunteers.

1 Jean Ortiz, *Sobre la gesta de los guerrilleros españoles en francia* (Biarritz: Atlántica, n/d) p.10

2 See: Robert Gildea *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (Harvard University Press, 2015) p.239

3 The expression *Maquis*, used to describe the guerrilla bands of the French Resistance, derives from the Corsican term for the dense scrub vegetation of hardy evergreen shrubs and small trees, characteristic of Mediterranean coastal regions.

Much celebrated in the localities where they fought, these foreign fighters do not fit into the post-war ideological reconstruction. The Chairman of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, Charles de Gaulle, who was committed to reconstructing French imperialism, wanted to stress the part that the French had played in liberating themselves from German occupation. An idealised depiction of the French Resistance as a united endeavour by patriotic French citizens was a useful foundation myth for the post-war French Republic. The important role played by large numbers of foreign fighters in that liberation, while so many French citizens had collaborated with the occupying forces, was uncomfortable. This is not to diminish the role of French citizens in opposing the Nazi occupation of France, but their actions need to be placed in context. The significance of their involvement in the Spanish Civil war is demonstrated in that many of the most effective resistance fighters in France were French veterans of the International Brigades that had fought alongside the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. But these volunteers did not fit the emerging mythology, having gone to fight fascism in Spain in defiance of the shameful policy of non-intervention pursued by the French government. So the Spanish *guerrilleros* were also returning that solidarity. In many ways, the Second World War was so much more than a war between nation states, it was also an international civil war and a class struggle.

However, the post-war world was quickly dividing into the Cold War blocs and new animosities were taking priority. The desire of many *guerrilleros* to go back over the Pyrenees and start an uprising against the dictatorship did not fit in with the plans of US, British and French governments, who saw Franco's Spain as a potential anticommunist ally against the Soviet Union. As so often happens, yesterday's heroes become tomorrow's terrorists.

The Camps

By early 1939, the defeat of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil was only a matter of time. As the victory of the Francoist forces approached, more and more refugees crossed the Pyrenees. They were not made welcome by an anticommunist French government led by Édouard Daladier,⁴ but at least they were admitted. The United Kingdom government refused to take any, while a mere 2,000, carefully selected on a sectarian basis, were allowed into the Soviet Union. Nearly half a million refugees crossed the border into France, where most were interned in a series of hastily constructed concentration camps in the South of France. However, the word "constructed" implies buildings, but the first two, Argelès and Saint-Cyprien, were merely barbed wires fences surrounding areas of the beach, in which the

⁴ Édouard Daladier had been defence minister in the Popular Front government from 1936-38, which was led by Leon Blum and had the support of the PCF. When the Blum government fell in 1938, Daladier took over as Prime Minister, moved the government significantly to the right and turned against his former communist and left-wing socialist allies.

refugees had no other shelter or sanitary arrangements than the holes they dug in the sand with their bare hands. Dysentery and similar illnesses were rife. They were surrounded and contained by the French Army, including African colonial troops, and the *Garde Mobile*.⁵

Slowly, more camps were opened and barrack blocks were constructed, mainly by the inmates themselves. The inmates considered the most politically active and therefore the dangerous and potentially disruptive, including soldiers of the Durruti Column⁶, as well as German and Italian volunteers of the International Brigades, were sent to special punishment camps, the most notorious being Le Vernet, at Ariège in the French Pyrenees. Conditions improved once the barrack blocks were erected, but food was always insufficient and sanitary conditions were primitive.⁷ Faced with this situation, 50,000 refugees returned to Spain despite the threat of reprisals from the Franco regime.⁸

While there was considerable hostility and mutual recrimination between the different political tendencies among the refugees, particularly between the Communists of the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE, Communist Party of Spain) on one hand and the Anarchists of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT, National Confederation of Labour), on the other, the shared suffering and the common feeling of being strangers in a strange land, as well as the need to stick together in resisting the oppression of the camp management, encouraged most to bury their differences and organise collectively.⁹

Apart from outright escapes, there were two main ways out of the camps. One was forced labour in the *Compagnies de Travailleurs Étrangers* (CTE, Companies of Foreign Workers), under the authority of the Ministry of War, assigned to carry out work reinforcing defensive fortifications such as the Maginot Line. By the outbreak of the war, there were 70,000 enrolled in the CTEs.¹⁰ Others were employed in war industries, for example, skilled engineers interned in the Septfonds camp in Tarn-et-Garonne were recruited by the aeroplane manufacturer Bréguet et Dewoitine in Toulouse.¹¹

The other was to join either the Foreign Legion or *Régiments de Marche de Volontaires Étrangers* (RMVE, Infantry Regiments of Foreign Volunteers). Despite its foul reputation for

5 Anne Grynberg, and Jacques Grandjonc, "Les Camps d'Internement dans le Sud de la France" in Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, *Les Étrangers dans la Résistance en France* (Besançon: Le musée, 1992) pp. 46-49.

6 The Durruti Column (Spanish: *Columna Durruti*), was the largest anarchist military unit formed during the Spanish Civil War.

7 Alberto Marín Valencia, *Espanoles en la resistencia francesa 1940-1945* (PhD thesis Universidad de Barcelona, 2019) pp.62-4

8 Michel Fabréguet, "Un Groupe de Réfugiés Politiques: Les Républicains Espagnols des Camps d'internement Français aux Camps de Concentration Nationaux-Socialistes (1939-1941)." *Revue d'histoire de La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et Des Conflits Contemporains* 36, no. 144 (1986) p.24

9 Fabréguet, *Un Groupe de Réfugiés Politiques*, p.26

10 David Winegate Pike, *Jours de Gloire. Jours de Honte* (SEDES, 1984) p.9

11 Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, "Les républicains espagnols dans le Tarn-et-Garonne et le Lot pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale". In *Vivre et mourir en temps de guerre de la préhistoire à nos jours*, edited by Patrice Foissac. (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2013) pp.303-312

brutal discipline, 15,000 Spanish republicans enlisted in the Foreign Legion and 9,000 joined the RMVE.¹²

In August 1939, the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics¹³ ruined the plans of the British and French governments who had hoped that Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union would fight each other, leaving Western Europe alone. The French government, which had itself recently signed its own agreement with Hitler at Munich in September 1938, was particularly furious about this and turned their rage on the French Communist Party (PCF, *Parti Communiste Français*), banning the party and arresting its leading militants, many of whom ended up in the same camps as the Spanish refugees.

The Hitler-Stalin Pact freed Hitler's hands to order the attack on Poland. This set in motion the Second World War, the first months of which were known as the "Phoney War". The French authorities rounded up most of the German and Austrian refugees and interned them in the camps as well, ignoring the fact that the overwhelming majority were in France to escape political repression and antisemitic violence and were therefore convinced enemies of the Nazi regime.

The camps became veritable Universities of Resistance, developing cultural and political education programs to maintain morale. CIMADE, a French Protestant NGO, assisted by bringing in books and helping to organise French language lessons.¹⁴ The latter would prove very useful in the future in helping foreign-born fighters communicate with their French comrades as the resistance developed.¹⁵ There was inevitably much political discussion and the Communist parties of Italy, Germany and Spain began to reorganise in the camps. Other left-wing political organisations were slower to organise, leaving the initiative to the Communists.

In May 1940, the German Army launched a devastating attack on France, in the face of which the French government quickly sued for peace, while the British Army scuttled off the beach at Dunkirk. The French parliament then voted full power to Marshal Philippe Pétain, who established a collaborationist, fascist state based in the spa town of Vichy, with nominal control of the south of the country, but in reality a puppet state of Nazi Germany. Pétain was a personal friend of Francisco Franco, having served as Ambassador to Madrid when the French government recognised the Franco regime in February 1939.¹⁶

12 Jean Ortiz, *Sobre la gesta de los guerrilleros españoles en francia* (Biarritz: Atlántica, n/d) p.11

13 Also known as the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

14 Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, "La Cimade dans les camps d'internement pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale" in. Dzovinar Kévonian et al. (eds) *La Cimade et l'accueil des réfugiés* (Presses Universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2013) p. 65-81

15 Jorge Marco, "'An Army of mutes in disguise' Languages and Transnational Resistance in France during the Second World War", *Language and Intercultural Communication* (2020)

16 Ortiz, *Los guerrilleros españoles en francia*, p.14-15

Throughout the war, the Nazi authorities had a particular fear and loathing of veterans of the Spanish Civil War. In 1940, Serrano Suñer, Franco's cousin and a particularly right-wing member of his government, visited Germany, where he agreed with Hitler to remove Spanish citizenship from all captured Republicans. As a result, Spanish Republican volunteers in units of the French Army were not treated as prisoners of war, but were immediately deported to various concentration camps in Germany. Eventually the majority, over 8,000, finished up in Mauthausen KZ, where two thirds of them would perish at the hands of the SS.¹⁷

The leadership of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE, *Partido Comunista de España*) had departed for exile in the USSR and Mexico, leaving space for a new younger leadership to develop in the camps. In mid-October 1940, the PCE held a clandestine plenary session in the Argelès-sur-mer camp, with delegates smuggled in from other camps. The official line of the Communist International (Komintern) was that this was an inter-imperialist war in which the workers should say neutral. The PCE plenary in the Argelès camp did not formally disagree with this analysis, but decided that, nevertheless, the fight against fascism continued. The plenary session decided:

- To reinforce aid to the internal struggle for the freedom of Spain, where possible returning militants to organise resistance to Franco.
- To oppose forced labour and resist enlistment in the CTE.
- To fight alongside the French people against Hitlerism and the "collaborators" of Vichy, ignoring the infamous treatment received upon arrival in France.
- To regroup communist militants and organize the escape of those interned in the camps.¹⁸

A new leadership was also elected as the "Delegation of the PCE Central Committee in France", led by Jesús Monzón.

In September 1940, the Vichy government reorganised the CTE into *Groupements de Travailleurs Étrangers* (GTE, Groups of Foreign Workers). The GTE became an important component of the workforce in the unoccupied zone, working in agriculture, industry, roads or forestry. Of the approximately 40,000 foreigners listed in the GTE in 1941, 15,700 were employed in agricultural work, 7,500 in logging and charcoal burning, 2,200 on dams, 2000

17 Michel Fabréguet, "Les « Espagnols Rouges » a Mauthausen (1940-1945)." *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 162 (1991) pp. 77–98.

18 Ortiz, *Los guerrilleros españoles*, p.30-31

Miguel Ángel, *Los guerrilleros españoles en Francia. 1940-1945*, (La Habana: Instituto del Libro, 1971) p.18

in the chemical industries, 1,400 in mines and 1,800 for disaster relief.¹⁹ In addition to this, 14,000 Spanish refugees were used as forced labour on the building of the Atlantic Wall.

While still under military discipline, the GTE allowed the refugees considerably greater freedom and many were able to use the groups as centres of anti-Nazi resistance.

Meanwhile, the Vichy government decided to deport those International Brigaders that they considered most dangerous to camps in Algeria, particularly Bossuet and Djelfa, in the southern part of Algeria in the Sahara Desert, there to be put to work building the TransSaharan Railway. On 22 March 1941 a convoy of International Brigaders was taken from Le Vernet to the coast at Argelès, to be put on a boat to the Algerian port of Oran. They were held next to a camp for refugee Spanish Republican women. Gendarmes were sent in to manage the embarkation of a first selection of Soviet Russians, Czechs, Poles and Romanians. One of the Russians, Semion Kramskoi, later wrote:

At 8 a.m. the prefect arrived and took charge of the embarkation. We were given an ultimatum but cried, 'We want to go home', 'We want our families' ... The gendarmes, who were armed to the teeth, began to beat the comrades and force them into the trucks. At this moment the Spanish women and children [from the neighbouring camp] smashed through the wire fences shouting and attacked the gendarmes. They blinded them with sand and broke the first line. The gendarmes were forced to deploy full force against women and children... two more companies of gendarmes arrived and used the utmost force. In spite of this, of the 180 who were supposed to embark, only 78 did so, and 24 hours later than intended.²⁰

Main-d'œuvre immigrée

France had an appallingly high casualty rate in the First World War, with over a million dead and another million permanently disabled veterans. This resulted in a severe shortage of labour which the government attempted to fill by recruiting nearly 3 million immigrant workers, mainly from Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia. While they officially came as economic migrants, many of these immigrant workers were also fleeing persecution from the extreme right-wing authoritarian and antisemitic governments in the countries of their birth.

In 1926, in order to facilitate the organisation of these immigrant workers, most of whom initially did not speak French, the *Parti Communiste Français* set up the *Main-d'œuvre étrangère* (MOE, Foreign Labour Force) through the *Confédération générale du travail*

19 Denis Peschanski. *Les camps français d'internement (1938-1946)*, Doctorat d'Etat. Histoire. Université Panthéon-Sorbonne - Paris I, (2000) p.231.

20 Letter of Semion Kramskoi from Camp de Bossuet, Algeria, 14 April 1941, quoted in Robert Gildea, Ismee Tames, *Fighters Across Frontiers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) p.57

unitaire (CGTU, United General Confederation of Labor} the trade union federation it dominated. This changed its name to *Main-d'œuvre immigrée* (MOI, Immigrant Labour Force) in 1932. It was divided into language sections, principally Italian, Yiddish, Polish and Spanish.

The defeat of the British and French Armies in June 1940 not only threw the French government into turmoil, the workers' movement was equally disrupted. However, the MOI, led by Louis Gronowski, Jacques Kaminski and Artur London, quickly reorganised to meet the new situation. Its organisation into semi-autonomous language groups facilitated the reconstruction of the organisation.²¹

Following the German Army's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the French Communist Party set up the *Francs-tireurs et partisans* (FTP, Guerrillas and Partisans) at the end of 1941, to act as an armed resistance organisation. The different groups of the MOI organised armed groups, FTP-MOI, based loosely on the different language sections. Although in theory subject to the same military command as the FTP, difficulties in communication due to language differences and the demands of a clandestine existence, as well as each national grouping also having a political agenda linked to their countries of origin, meant that these groups operated with a high degree of independence.

Two of the early leaders of the FTP-MOI in Paris were Spanish, Conrado Miret-Must and Joaquim Olasso, but they were soon arrested along with seventy others. Thereafter, very few Spaniards enlisted directly in the FTP-MOI, normally on an individual basis. The majority of Spanish resistance fighters were to be found in an independent organisation, also led by Communists, that emerged from the experience of the internment camps, *XIV Cuerpo de Ejército Guerrillero* (Fourteenth Guerrilla Army Corps).

XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero

In April 1942, Jaime Nieto, a leading Spanish Communist, assembled a dozen former Republican officers who had escaped from the camps and, together they founded the *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero*, named after a guerrilla formation that was part of the Spanish Republican Army fighting behind enemy lines. They had the joint aim of liberating France from the Nazis and Spain from Franco.²² This dual priority was to cause a certain tension



Vicente López Tovar

21 Sheila Ann Finnemore, *Hidden From View: Foreigners In The French Resistance*, University of Birmingham, MPhil, 2013, p.48

22 Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (Harvard University Press, 2015) p.225

with the French Communist Party, whose leadership felt that the foreign fighters on French soil should prioritise the French Resistance. There were similar tensions between the PCF and the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI), who were also as much interested in overthrowing the Mussolini regime at home as they were in fighting the German occupying forces in France.²³

The first commander of the *guerrilleros* was Jesús Ríos García, who had been an officer in the original *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero* in Spain during the Civil War. It was organized in brigades composed of 60 to 90 men, but from the end of 1943 it was structured into two divisions. Officially it was part of the *Franc-Tireurs et Partisans*, but in practice operated with a great deal of independence.

Vicente López Tovar was to become an important figure in the development of the Spanish guerrilla involvement in the anti-Nazi resistance in France. He was a member of the PCE and a Colonel in the Republican Army who had fought in many of the major battles of the Civil War, including the battle of the Ebré and the final defence of Madrid. Arriving in France in March 1939, he managed to avoid being interned with the help of SERE (*Servicio de evacuación de refugiados españoles*) and lived under an assumed name in Toulouse. Having been tipped off that the police were on to him he took refuge in a forestry company, *Entreprise Forestière du Sud-Ouest*, which acted as a cover for the early organisation of the guerrilla forces.²⁴ It was from this modest start that López Tovar founded the 3rd Brigade of the *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero*. He was in regular touch with Jesús Monzón who was setting up the *Union Nacional Española* (UNE, Spanish National Union) as the political wing of the movement.²⁵

Union Nacional Española

Between the first and the eleventh November 1942, the founding conference of the *Unión Nacional Española* (UNE, Spanish National Union) was held in the strictest secrecy in Toulouse and announced as a united body for all Spanish antifascists.

Recognising that the disunity between different parties and unions had been a factor in the Republicans losing to the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, they invited all antifascist tendencies to join them. The leaderships of the Anarchist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT), the Marxist *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM) and the Social-Democratic *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) ignored the invitation, but

23 Steve Cushion, "German and Italian Volunteers in the French Resistance" in *Treason, Rebel Warriors and Internationalist Traitors*, edited by Steve Cushion and Christian Høgsbjerg (Socialist History, 2019) pp.66-70

24 Secundino Serrano, *Maquis - Historia de la guerrilla antifranquista* (Madrid: Temas De Hoy, 2001) p.127

25 André Balent, *López Tovar Vicente*, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article140416>.

Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames. *Fighters across Frontiers: Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936-48*. (Manchester University Press, 2020) pp.38-39.

important sections of these organisations within France as well as a considerable number of their individual members and supporters responded positively to the call.²⁶

The UNE program was reproduced in the clandestine newspaper *Reconquista de España* (Reconquest of Spain), which became the official organ of the UNE: It proclaimed itself as a unitary platform bringing together all opponents of Francoism around the independence of Spain, the constitution of a government of national unity and the re-establishment of elementary democratic freedoms.

The Manifesto stated

The difficult times in which we live force us to put aside the differences, hatreds and passions that until today have separated us, to place the superior interest of Spain above all and to spare our people the war and death in which the Falange and Franco want to sink them.

Unconditionally helping the French people in their heroic struggle for liberation, we work to liberate ourselves. All those that are able will return to Spain to continue the fight.²⁷

While UNE was dominated by the PCE, the Communists went out of their way to accommodate the other tendencies, with the Anarchists even having their own newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* (Workers' Solidarity). This desire for unity on the part of the Delegation of the PCE Central Committee in France, seems to have been quite genuine. It is a constant theme in surviving copies of their newspaper, *Reconquista de España*, as well as in locally produced, hand printed propaganda in both Spanish and French.

This unusual political openness enabled the UNE to become the principal voice of the Spanish refugees in France, enabling a united front in the face of the events in the wider war.

The UNE as an umbrella organisation for Spanish antifascists was preceded by local groupings, often using the formula *Frente Nacional Español* (Spanish National Front), and so the November conference can be seen as the coming together of these grassroots committees. Indeed, even before the November conference, 28 people had been arrested by the French police in the department of Lot-et-Garonne and charged with membership of a terrorist organisation named *Union Nacional Española por la Reconquista de España*.²⁸ Despite the severe repression by the Vichy police and the German occupation authorities,

26 In Barcelona in May 1937, there was fighting between POUM and Anarchist militias on one side and Republican police, who were loyal to the PCE, on the other. The POUM/CNT lost this encounter and suffered considerable repression, including the murder of the POUM leader Andreu Nin. This left the leaderships of the POUM and the CNT suspicious of the intentions of the PCE in France. For accounts of the May 1937 fighting from two very different perspectives see: Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War* and Pierre Broué, *The 'May Days' of 1937 in Barcelona*.

27 Ortiz, *Los guerrilleros españoles en francia*, pp.34-35.

28 Charles Farreny Del Bosque et Henri Farreny Del Bosque, "L'affaire Reconquista de España. Important épisode méconnu de la Résistance espagnole dans le Sud-Ouest", in Patrice Foissac (ed.) *Vivre et mourir en temps de guerre de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Presses universitaires du Midi, 2013)

UNE was able to build a significant organisation as part of the antifascist resistance in France.

Thus in one department, Lot, which has been studied by Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, every resistance group had some members who were Spanish Republicans and there were four groups composed entirely of Spaniards: *Liberté* in Grèzes, *République* in Espagnac, *Fraternité* in Camboulit and *Malaterra* in Lauzès.²⁹

Service du Travail Obligatoire and the Maquis

By 1943, the losses on the Eastern front resulted in the German government deciding to implement a programme of forced recruitment of labour from France to compensate for their lack of manpower in German industry. This measure would have unintended detrimental effects on the German war effort.

The *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO, Compulsory Labour Service), started in February 1943, was the organisation set up by the Vichy government to organise the dispatch of forced labour from France to Germany. Some 600,000 workers were sent to Germany from France in 1943 and 1944. Another 200,000 managed to evade the round-up and these young men formed the basis for the massive increase in the rural resistance. This round-up and deportation to what was essentially enslaved labour, was enforced by the French Police and *Gendarmerie* who were aided by French fascist paramilitaries, such as the *Milice* and *Parti populaire français*, (PPF, French Popular Party), as well as the German armed forces. The STO was massively unpopular and may be seen as an important turning point in alienating French public opinion from the Vichy government of Maréchal Pétain. There was a severe shortage of labour in the rural areas as a million and a half French soldiers were still being held in German POW camps. The *réfractaires*, as those fleeing the STO were called, were sheltered in rural areas in return for their labour on farms and it was a natural step to supporting them as they took to the hills and forests when the Vichy authorities came looking for them. In turn it was logical for these *réfractaires* to arm themselves against the forces of repression. They then quickly turned from defence to attack, from being the hunted to the hunters. Given that most of the *réfractaires* were from the cities, they were as much "strangers" in the countryside as the foreign volunteers.

In some ways, the existence of the rural Resistance can be seen as a form of large scale collective action, a form of community civil disobedience. This was a milieu that welcomed the Spanish, German, Yugoslav, Italian and Polish veterans of the International Brigades as they had a common enemy in the German and Italian occupation forces together with their French fascist allies, while their previous military experience was much appreciated. The

29 Dreyfus-Armand, *Les républicains espagnols dans le Tarn-et-Garonne et le Lot*, pp.303-312

German authorities certainly saw the situation as a rural revolt and treated the peasants in the villages with extreme brutality. There was a general policy of burning villages and massacring civilians in areas of strong *Maquis* activity in an attempt to terrorise the base of support of the guerrilla bands.

The introduction of the STO was a turning point for the Resistance in France. It became almost impossible to be neutral and the situation forced many people who had previously kept their heads down to take sides. An increasing number sided with the Resistance and started to see the foreign fighters as allies against a brutal enemy.³⁰

For example, in the Lot, in the vicinity of Figeac, Jean-Jacques Chapou set up, with the inclusion of 230 Spanish Republicans, the "Liberté-République-Fraternité" maquis. Even more vulnerable than the French resistance fighters due to their status as refugees, the Spanish resistance fighters brought their experience of armed struggle acquired in Spain and were specialists in rapid actions harassing the occupying troops, although many Spanish Republicans fell during these clashes.³¹

While most Spanish Republican volunteers in the Resistance fought in Spanish speaking units organised through UNE, there were a considerable number who, locally isolated from other Spaniards, joined French speaking groups. Almost every small Museum of the Resistance in rural France has photographs of Spanish volunteers who were active members and often leaders of the local *maquis*.

For example, a panel in the Musée de la Résistance en Morvan à Saint-Brisson has two photographs of Spanish Republican Resistance fighters, Pedro Gorotitza and Lise la Bournot. The staff at the museum know little of Pedro Gorotitza other than that he was leader of the 30 strong Spanish Section of the maquis Camille. However, a panel says of Lise la Bournot:

Of Spanish origin, Lise la Bournot participated with her Republican comrades in the fight against Franco in 1936. In 1938, she married George le Bournot, with whom she joined the Resistance in the department of Nièvre. In the region of Crux-la-Ville they set up the maquis "Daniel", named after their son. They recruited young people and sent them to the camps of the Resistance. They also guided reinforcements from other groups during the battle for Crux-la-Ville.



30 HR Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon 1994), Chapter 2.

31 Dreyfus-Armand, *Les républicains espagnols dans le Tarn-et-Garonne et le Lot*, pp.303-312.

Women in the Resistance

A photograph of Lise la Bournot appears on the poster advertising an open air exhibition of the role of women in the Resistance displayed in the town of Lormes in the Morvan.

From the very beginning, Spanish women played a heroic role within the Resistance. Dozens of them spent many years in French prisons and in Nazi extermination camps.

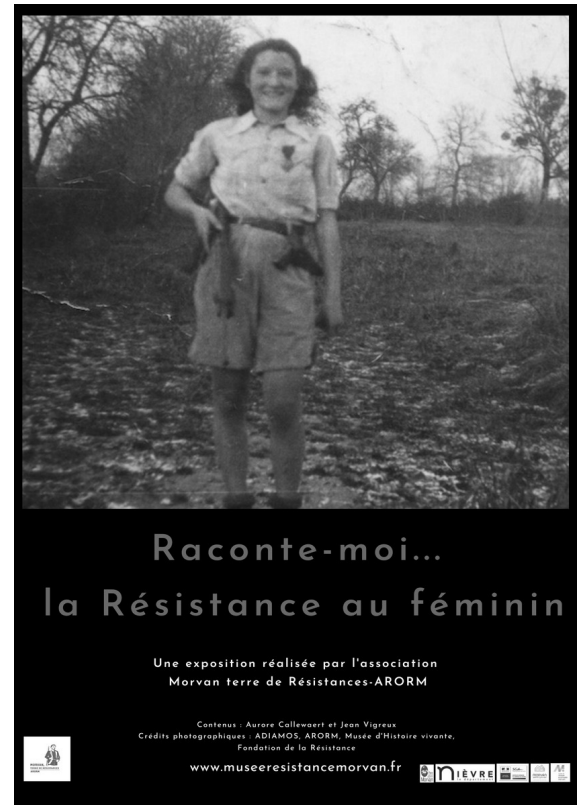
Women were mainly involved in:

- the information services of the Resistance
- in the maintenance of safe houses to hide and support guerrillas or anti-fascists in transit or on the run
- in the transport of material, including weapons
- in attacks
- in sabotage
- in the liberation of prisoners
- in the setting up of escape networks
- in the recovery of material sent by the Allies by parachute.

Neus Catalá writes:

"As women, we were generally used as liaison agents for different networks, crossing mountains and borders, organising rendezvous, supporting prisoners and in the prisons, where we were in charge of emergency care. We were the first to suffer the controls of the French police and the German patrols, and we were often in charge of transporting weapons and propaganda. On the other hand, their participation in violent actions was very rare. It was very rare to find women among the maquis. In the virile atmosphere of the maquis, the inclusion of women was seen as a source of complications".

The clandestine press was a very important source of information. It was one of the most dangerous activities carried out by Resistance volunteers. Many women, during the long years of underground work, transported and distributed newspapers such as *Reconquista de España*, *Mundo Obrero*, or *Solidaridad Obrera*. The former resistance fighter Maria



Gonzalez says: "I distributed propaganda leaflets with other Spanish women on the rue de la Défense, near my house".³²

Armée Secrète

Throughout 1943 and early 1944, the *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero* maintained its ambiguous relationship with the FTP-MOI. Displaying increasing operational independence as their numbers grew, they were still involved in the FTP command structure. Thus, in January 1944, Vicente López Tovar became a member of the military committee of the FTP-MOI and regional organiser of the MOI in Périgord as well as being local commander of the *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero*. The main resistance actions during this period were sabotage and train derailments, with direct confrontation with the occupying forces avoided where possible.

The political openness of UNE also allowed them to collaborate with the Gaullist *Armée Secrète* (AS, Secret Army). This enabled them to obtain supplies of weapons from parachute drops as the British and US Allies were far more willing to supply the Gaullists than the Communist FTP. For example, Cristino Garcia Granda led the 3rd Division of the *XIV Guerrilleros*, which covered the departments of Gard, Lozère and Ardèche. An important section of the *Armée Secrète* in the Ardeche was led by Juan Pujadas, a Spanish anarcho-syndicalist who refused to accept the authority of UNE. Nevertheless, Cristino Garcia formed a military alliance with Juan Pujadas, burying their political differences until a later date. In return, the AS supplied Cristino Garcia's unit with armaments from a series of *parachutages*, which made the 3rd Division the best armed of the *XIV Guerrilleros*.



Cristino Garcia Granda

Nevertheless, it was acting at the request of the FTP commander in the Gard that Cristino Garcia assembled a commando unit of 14 *guerrilleros* and attacked the prison in Nîmes on 4 February 1944. With the assistance of a friendly prison guard, this action freed 76 resistance prisoners and brought them safely to the FTP-MOI *maquis* in Saint-Frézal-de-Ventalon et des Bouzèdes in the Lozère.³³ Anyone looking for uniformity or pattern in an underground military movement, based entirely on volunteers, will be disappointed as local alliances were much more important than the political line sent down from above.

³² This section relies heavily on the excellent work of Alberto Marín Valencia, *Españoles en la resistencia francesa 1940-1945* (PhD thesis, Universidad de Barcelona, 2019) pp.115-118 & 171-179. Any Spanish speaker who wishes to pursue this subject further would be well advised to start with this exhaustive account.

³³ Hervé Maura, *García Granda Cristino*, <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article50437>.

Maquis des Glières

One of the most celebrated battles in which the *guerrilleros* took part was on the Plateau des Glières near Annecy in the Haute Savoie department near the border with Switzerland. The Maquis des Glières, under the command of a career French officer Tom Morel, assembled 456 resistance fighters, 300 from the *Armée Secrete*, 100 FTP and 56 Spaniards. Their main purpose was to receive a massive parachute drop of armaments from the RAF. In February and March 1944, they succeeded in collecting three large parachute drops consisting of about 300 containers packed with explosives and small arms, including Sten sub-machine guns, Lee–Enfield rifles, Bren light machine guns and Mills bombs, despite the plateau being besieged by 2,000 French collaborationist police and militia. On 12 March, after the largest Allied parachute drop, the German air force bombed the plateau and, after an assault by Vichy forces failed, on 26 March, 4,000 German soldiers and military police stormed the plateau. The *Maquisards* suffered some losses and successfully retreated but a number were captured, tortured and murdered. In all, between 120 and 150 lost their lives, of whom 10 were known to be Spanish volunteers. The local resistance recovered quickly from this defeat and on 19 August 1944, at the Hôtel Splendid in Annecy, which was the German forces headquarters, the German colonel commanding the occupying forces in the Haute-Savoie officially surrendered to the Resistance, amongst whom were 250 Spanish volunteers. The Haute-Savoie became the first zone to be freed entirely by Resistance forces.³⁴

Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles

With Allied landings on D-Day approaching, as well as the increasing gains by the Red Army in the East, the defeat of Nazi Germany became likely and the Resistance in France, increasingly confident, began to reorganise. The various Resistance movements coalesced, at least formally, into the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI, French Forces of the Interior) in February 1944. The *XIV Cuerpo Guerrillero*, felt sufficiently large to separate itself from the FTP. Renamed the *Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles* (AGE, Spanish Guerrilla Group), in May 1944, it received direct representation in the command structure of the FFI.³⁵

The most spectacular involvement by the AGE in the events following the Allied landings in the south of France on August 15 1944 was the battle of La Madeleine, near the town of Alés. The resistance fighters in the Cévennes region were mobilized to try to stop a German column of 2,000 men travelling in 150 trucks, which was heading back towards the Rhone Valley from Toulouse.

34 Gaston Laroche, *On les nommait des étrangers: les immigrés dans la Résistance* (Paris: Editeurs français réunis, 1965) pp. 193-194.

35 Marín Valencia, *Españoles en la resistencia francesa*, pp.140-141;
Ortiz, *Los guerrilleros españoles en francia*, pp.50-51.



Cristino García Granda, in front of a group of guerrilleros in France

Attacked by the maquis at Saint Hippolyte du Fort, a third of the column (about 700 men) avoided combat and headed towards Alès. At the pass of La Madeleine, 32 *guerrilleros* of the 21st brigade of the AGE commanded by Gabriel Perez and Miguel Arcas along with 8 local French FTP managed to blow the railway bridge ahead and the road behind, trapping the trucks. Firing from cover the partisans pinned down the German soldiers until a squadron of RAF planes arrived to machine-gun the column. The Germans lost 300 dead and wounded, with 1,100 prisoners. The German lieutenant-general Konrad A. Nietzsche commanding the column would only surrender to regular soldiers, not to those he described as "terrorists", but finally compromised by surrendering to the local *gendarme*. He subsequently committed suicide. The guerrillas had only one wounded.³⁶

An official report, issued by the national headquarters of the FFI, records the results of actions carried out by Spanish guerrilla units:³⁷

- bridges destroyed: 150
- locomotives damaged: 80
- electric lines sabotaged: 600
- electricity generating plants destroyed: 6
- attacks on factories: 20
- major sabotage in coal mines: 22

³⁶ <https://www.cevennesresistance.fr/resistance-maquis/les-espagnols-dans-la-resistance-cevenole.pdf>; Guillermo Guter, "Operación Madeleine: la batalla más exitosa de la Resistencia francesa que organizó un asturiano", *Voz de Asturias*, 12 September 2021, <https://www.lavozdeasturias.es/noticia/asturias/2021/09/10/operacion-madeleine-batalla-exitosa-resistencia-francesa-organizo-asturiano/00031631267482642521655.htm>

³⁷ Laroche, *On les nommait des étrangers*, p.203; Ortiz, *Los guerrilleros españoles en Francia*, p.57.

- armed engagements: 512
- enemy prisoners: 9,800
- enemy deaths: 3000
- prison rescues: 10



Spanish Republican volunteers in the Liberation parade in Bagnères-de-Bigorre,

The town of Foix in the department of Ariège was liberated by a force entirely composed of Spanish Republicans, led by José Antonio Alonso Alcalde. The AGE participated alongside French Resistance fighter in the liberation of other towns: Prayols, Rimont, Castelnau, Rodez, Carmaux, Albi, Gaillac, Limoux, Prades, Toulouse, Bagnères-de-Bigorre.³⁸

None of this pleased General de Gaulle. On 16 September 1944, de Gaulle was in Toulouse for its liberation celebration. Reviewing a parade of the Resistance fighters who had liberated the city, he was reported to be angered by the presence of 3,000 Spanish republicans, who had no uniforms except German helmets that they had painted blue.³⁹ They were not the only Spanish Republicans who caused de Gaulle anxiety.

³⁸ Ortiz, *Rojos*, p.56

³⁹ Robert Gildea, et al. *Fighters across Frontiers: Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936-48* (Manchester University Press, 2020) p.216.

North Africa to Paris

In March 1939, 10,000 - 12,000 Spanish Republican refugees arrived directly in North Africa. As in Metropolitan France, most of the men were interned in makeshift camps. They were joined by a large number of men deported from the mainland. Eventually a considerable number of internees were transferred to work in the GTE in Algeria.⁴⁰

In France, in September 1939, thousands of Spanish refugees joined the Foreign Legion or *Régiments de Marche de Volontaires Étrangers* (RMVE, Infantry Regiments of Foreign Volunteers), facing the *Wehrmacht* during the 1939-1940 German invasion of France, as well as fighting in Norway with the British and French expeditionary forces opposing the German invasion, whence many were evacuated to England with the retreating British Army, where the majority joined the *Forces Françaises Libres* (FFL, Free French Forces), as those military units that supported de Gaulle became known. Those who remained in the Foreign Legion in France after the armistice were sent to Africa where they served in different units of the army of Vichy. In North Africa, after the Allied landings of November 1942, the camps and the GTEs both served as recruiting grounds for the *Corps Francs d'Afrique* (CFA, African Free Corps), an armed force set up with US approval as an interim measure following the US landings, given responsibility for protecting the rear of the US forces engaged against the German and Italian forces that remained in Africa.⁴¹ Many Spaniards in the CFA and the Foreign Legion decided on their "spontaneous transfers" and joined the FFL. Between 1940 and 1945, thousands of Spaniards served in the Free French Forces, from Norway to Berchtesgaden, via Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Italy and France. They provided the largest foreign contingent serving under the Free French flag.⁴²

However, a majority the soldiers in the FFL were Africans, who had followed Félix Éboué, governor of *Afrique-Équatoriale Française* (A.-É.F, French Equatorial Africa), when he declared his support for General de Gaulle. He organised an army of 40,000 soldiers, part of which was the *Régiment de Marche du Tchad* (RMT, Infantry Regiment of Chad) commanded by General Leclerc, which headed to North Africa after the US landings.⁴³

In May 1943, in Libya, General Leclerc organised the *2e Division Blindée* (2e DB, 2nd Armoured Division) of the FFL, merging the RMT with volunteers from the CFA and Foreign Legion, which included many Spanish Republicans. One of the units of the new

40 Denis Peschanski. *Les camps français d'internement (1938-1946)*, Doctorat d'Etat. Histoire. Université Panthéon-Sorbonne - Paris I, (2000) p.40

41 Romain Durand, "Le corps franc d'Afrique et la reconstruction des armées françaises" *Revue historique des Armées* 209 (1997) pp. 61-72.

42 Diego Gaspar Celaya, "Portrait d'oubliés. L'engagement des Espagnols dans les Forces françaises libres, 1940-1945", *Revue historique des armées* 265 (2011) pp.3-4.

43 Eric Jennings, *La France libre fut africaine* (Paris: Perrin) 2014.

army, called *La Nueve* (9e compagnie du 3e bataillon du RMT de la 2e DB), consisted of Spanish volunteers under the command of a French officer, *le capitaine* Raymond Dronne.⁴⁴

The 2nd Armoured Division was outfitted with US armoured vehicles and transferred to England. The US Army, itself racially segregated, demanded the reduction of the number of African and Arab soldiers, so the Spanish were given priority in the Normandy landings, where they took part in the fighting as part of the 2nd US Army.⁴⁵ The 2e DB consisted of 16,000 soldiers, of whom a fifth were Spanish, 160 tanks, 80 armoured cars, 200 half-tracks and 36 tank destroyers.⁴⁶ In one engagement on 14 August, a unit of 2nd Armoured Division, mainly composed of Spanish Anarchists, carried out a raid 3 km behind the German lines, taking 130 prisoners as well as seizing 13 vehicles, and freeing 8 American prisoners of war.⁴⁷

On 20 August 1944, the Resistance in Paris launched an uprising and the Second Armoured Division, possibly in defiance of instructions from General Patton, set off for Paris to support the uprising. While de Gaulle was keen that the first troops to arrive in Paris should be Free French, he felt that it would not look good for the capital of the French Empire to be liberated by Black colonial troops. At least the Spanish looked European, so the first armoured vehicles to enter Paris were driven by the Spanish Republicans of *La Nueve*, flying the flag of the Spanish Republic. On the afternoon of 25 August, 1944, at 3:30 p.m., the German garrison surrendered, and its commander, General von Choltitz, was taken prisoner by three Spaniards, led by Lieutenant Amado Granell, deputy commander of *la Nueve*, before being handed over to a French officer.⁴⁸

There is a legend that von Choltitz spoke in impeccable French as he handed his pistol to Amado Granell, who replied "*No hablo Frances*" (I do not speak French).

La Nueve fought on with the Second Armoured Division, taking part in the liberation of Strasbourg and finally reaching Hitler's bunker on 5 May 1945, by which time only 16 of the original 146 Spanish volunteers was still standing, 35 were dead and 97 wounded.

None of this pleased de Gaulle, but he was caught by the fact that his best troops were Communists, Africans, Arabs and Spaniards. He was however adept at rewriting history.

Return to Spain

One of the first groups of "*pasadores*", who maintained control of the illicit border crossings from France to Spain, was led by the Anarchist Francisco Ponzán. This group

44 Gaspar Celaya, *Portrait d'oubliés*, p.8

45 Alberto Marín Valencia, *Españoles en la resistencia francesa 1940-1945* (PhD thesis Universidad de Barcelona, 2019) p.337

46 Alberto Marín Valencia, *Españoles en la resistencia francesa*, p.315

47 Evelyn Mesquida, *La Nueve : Ces Républicains espagnols qui ont libéré Paris* (Paris: Le Cherche midi, 2011) p.119

48 Mesquida, *La Nueve*, p.164

allowed many persecuted people to cross the border and saved their lives. A "special group" of hardened militants enabled the crossing of the border by communist leaders, but also by persecuted Jews, Belgian and French patriots, American agents and liaison officers and English airmen who crossed Spain to go to North Africa, to join up with the Allied forces. They served as an important link in the chain between the Resistance in France and the Allied authorities, forming a particularly important section of the "Pat O'Leary" escape line for Allied soldiers and airmen. In return, the Allies supplied them with money and arms that they intended to use against the Franco regime in Spain after the war.

Women played an important role in these networks. The testimony of Manuel Huet, referring to Segunda Montero, known as "Conchita", says: "We will simply point out that Conchita was an admirable link in the famous evasion network known as the *Réseau Pat O'Leary*⁴⁹, operating directly under the orders of Gérard Vogel, "el Rubio", a trusted man of the head of the network, Francisco Ponzán Vidal". Ponzán was captured in 1943 and executed in 1944 by the Germans.⁵⁰ These *pasadores* would be vital for the *guerrilleros* who would return to Spain to restart the struggle against the Franco regime.⁵¹

Many *guerelleros* thought it inconceivable that the anti-fascist victory would stop at the foot of the Pyrenees and leave Franco in Madrid, but in October 1944, the Provisional Government of the French Republic ordered the AGE to disband and disarm, subsequently banning the AGE newspaper, *Reconquista de España*. The Allies had other plans for Franco.

On November 8 1942, Roosevelt himself had written to Franco saying: "Spain should not fear the United States, General; I am your sincere friend". Churchill had long been an admirer of Franco. On September 15, 1945, the French government signed an economic agreement with Madrid and the French *Sûreté Nationale* collaborated with the Spanish *Brigada Político-Social* to betray the details of the *guerrillero* organisation in France. In fact, it was the Cold War that was starting at the foot of the Pyrenees.⁵²

Despite this, a UNE conference in 1944 unanimously decided to follow the military line recommended by the leadership, which would, it was hoped, provoke an insurrection in Spain through an armed invasion. The CNT delegates voted to continue the united front with the Communists. As a sign of their commitment to unity, the Anarchist José Ruiz Larrocha presided over the UNE Departmental Committee in Pau.⁵³

49 Pat O'Leary was, in fact, the pseudonym of a Belgian Resistance worker, Major General Count Albert-Marie Edmond Guérisse. The volunteers were all Belgian, French and Spanish.

50 Robert Gildea, Ismee Tames, *Fighters Across Frontiers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) p. 98.

51 Jean Ortiz, *Rojos: La gesta de los guerrilleros españoles en Francia* (Caracas: El perro y la rana, 2012) p.67-68.

52 Ortiz, *Rojos*, pp.78-79.

53 Ortiz, *Rojos*, p.70.

Jesús Monzón, the main leader of the communist exiles in France, had already entered Spain clandestinely in the spring of 1943, and was in fact acting as general secretary in the interior. He had written to Jacques Duclos, leader of the French Communist Party expecting a return of support, but received an unenthusiastic response.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a number of French volunteers, who had fought alongside the *guerrilleros* in France, joined their comrades in the invasion.

For more than two months, during late 1944, the AGE sent thousands of guerrillas into Spain. They entered along the entire Pyrenean border. The main invasion, "*el paso*", took place from 19 to 29 October 1944. Some 3,000 guerrillas tried to take the border valley of Aran to turn it into a Republican enclave and hopefully install a provisional government. Overly optimistic and poorly prepared, without the necessary popular support, the operation failed in the face of the counter-offensive of Francoist troops. A new "retreat" to France began.⁵⁵ Arriving belatedly in Toulouse, Santiago Carillo, future leader of the PCE, ordered the abandonment of the operation and succeeded in placing all the blame on Jesús Monzón, who was expelled from the PCE. Monzón was arrested in Barcelona in July 1945 and sentenced to 30 years in prison, although he was released in 1959. The incursion cost the lives of 129 *guerrilleros*, with another 241 wounded and 218 taken prisoner, most of whom were executed.⁵⁶ Lower level guerrilla warfare continued until 1952, but with limited effect on the regime.⁵⁷



Jesús Monzón Reparaz

From Heroes to Terrorists and halfway back again

The problem for the *guerrilleros* was that, while they were very useful to the liberation of France from Nazi occupation and Vichy collaboration, they, along with the other foreign antifascist Resistance fighters and the predominantly African rank and file soldiers in the Free French Forces, did not fit with the nationalist foundation myth of the new French Republic: France had liberated itself.⁵⁸ The fact that the overwhelming number of Spanish *guerrilleros* were Communists or Anarchists made them even less acceptable to de Gaulle as the new French government moved increasingly to support the USA in the emerging Cold

⁵⁴ Serrano, *Maquis*, p.131.

⁵⁵ Ortiz, *Rojos*, pp.70-73.

⁵⁶ Serrano, *Maquis*, p.131

⁵⁷ For Spanish speakers who are interested in the details, Serrano's *Maquis* is the accepted standard account.

⁵⁸ The PCF, as part of the first post-war coalition had accepted the minimisation of the role of foreign fighters in the Resistance, but, as the Cold War developed, the party recognised their contribution formally when they supported the publication of *On Les Nommeait des Étrangers: les Immigrés dans La Résistance* (Éditeurs français réunis, 1965), written by Gaston Laroche.

War and began to repress the French Communist Party, which was still closely allied to the PCE

The attempt to re-enter Spain to fight a guerrilla war against the Franco regime brought the matter to a head and the French government was concerned that members of the PCE were taking an active part in the strikes in 1945 and 1947. They accused them of "transporting the political struggles and conflicts of their respective countries to our territory". On 27 January 1950, Jules Moch, Minister of the Interior, announced: "I cannot tolerate emigrants transposing their struggles to our territory, and even less so mixing with ours. We will not tolerate plots against foreign governments or against our own". The government invented an "international communist conspiracy in the Pyrenees". The newspapers *France-Soir*, *Le Populaire* and even the normally serious *Le Monde* denounced the existence of a "Soviet fifth column" preparing the invasion of France, as part of a plan drawn up in Moscow.⁵⁹

Then, on September 7, 1950, the police operation "Bolero-Paprika", named as such because it concerned not only Spaniards (Bolero) but also individuals from Eastern countries (Paprika), was launched on French territory. It targeted 397 foreigners considered to be "undesirable" (amongst whom 251 were Spanish) and resulted in the arrest of 292 men and women of twelve different nationalities: Greeks, Italians, Mexicans and five stateless persons were also concerned by the operation. The "Paprika" component concerned sixty-five Poles, fourteen Soviets, five Hungarians, five Czechs, four Romanians and one Bulgarian. They were directly expelled to Eastern Europe. Twelve Italians who were members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) were deported to their country of origin, while five stateless persons and four Greeks were deported to the German Democratic Republic.⁶⁰

It took more than thirty years for monuments and tributes to be erected in honour of the Spanish guerrillas. A significant number of these monuments were promoted by associations of former guerrillas who remained in France, but they are still few and far between. Alberto Marín Valencia has only been able to find memorials in Prayols (Ariege), Alet-les Bains (Aude), Annecy (Haute-Savoie), Noailhac (Corrèze), Castelnau-sur-l'Auvignon (Gers), Grenade (Haute-Garonne) and Buziet (Pirineos Atlánticos), Enveitg (Pyrénées-Orientales), while in Toulouse there is a *Rue de Vicente López Tovar, Républicaine espagnol et résistant 1909-1998*.⁶¹

While many municipalities that were liberated with the help of Spanish Republicans still honoured their memory, particularly in local museums, nationally they were written out of history. In 1965, Gaston Laroche, a former officer in the FTP, published *On Les Nomrait*

⁵⁹ Ortiz, *Rojos*, pp.81-82

⁶⁰ Denoyer, Aurélie. *L'exil comme patrie* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017), Chap. 2. L'Opération Boléro-Paprika.

⁶¹ Alberto Marín Valencia, *Espanoles en la resistencia francesa*, pp.384-6

Des Étrangers: Les Immigrés dans La Résistance (They were called foreigners: Immigrants in the Resistance), which painstakingly reconstructed the contribution of immigrant fighters, but it had little national impact.⁶² We had to wait until the late 1990s for the work of Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand to begin to change French academic opinion.⁶³

In August 2004, as a result of a campaign by Anne Hidalgo, who was then deputy-mayor, Paris officially paid tribute to the *la Nueve*, inaugurating a plaque "To the Spanish Republicans, main component of the Dronne column". There are now 12 plaques around the city tracing the route *La Nueve* took from Porte d'Italie through to the Hôtel de Ville, via rue Esquirol. Elected mayor of Paris in 2014, Anne Hidalgo has hosted an annual ceremony in the *Jardin des Combattants de la Nueve* (Garden of the Ninth Company Fighters), alongside a representative of the Spanish government and descendants of those who fought.⁶⁴

Perhaps the one exception to this deliberate erasure from history is Cristino García Granda. After his activism in the Resistance in France described above, he returned to Spain where he sought to organise guerrilla operations against the Franco regime. Captured on 15 October 1945, he was tortured and was executed by firing squad on 21 February 1946. This caused a wave of indignation in France and the French *Assemblée Nationale* passed a motion calling on the government to break diplomatic relations with Spain and indeed the border was closed for two years. A postage stamp was issued bearing his likeness.



Thus, in August 1946, a street in Saint-Denis (Seine, Seine-Saint-Denis) was named after Cristino Garcia. In Nîmes, an alleyway bears his name. There are also several other streets named after Cristino Garcia: in Paris (20th arrondissement); in Drancy; in La Courneuve in Hauts-de-Seine; in Perreux-sur-Marne (Val-de-Marne); in Eaubonne (Val d'Oise). Cristino Garcia also gave his name to a school in Drancy and to one of the two sites of the Lucie-Faure college in Paris (20th arrondissement).

In the heart of the Cévennes, at site of the battle of La Madeleine-Tornac, between Alès and Anduze, a marble plaque honours his memory but fails to mention his Spanish comrades.⁶⁵ But he was then safely dead and could cause no further trouble to the French nationalist mythology.

62 Laroche, Gaston. *On Les Nommaient des Étrangers les Immigrés dans La Résistance* (Éditeurs français réunis, 1965)

63 Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, *La guerra y la resistencia en Francia en Memoria del olvido. La contribución de los Republicanos Españoles a la Resistencia y la Liberación de Francia. 1939-1945* (Paris: F.A.C.E.E.F. 1996)

Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, *L'exil des républicains espagnols en France* (Paris :Éditions Albin Michael. 1999)

64 <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210825-paris-honours-the-forgotten-spanish-fighters-la-nueve-who-liberated-the-capital-liberation-world-war-2-nazi-general-charles-de-gaulle>

65 <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article50437>, notice GARCÍA GRANDA Cristino [also written GARCÍA GRANDAS] by Hervé Mauran,

It took until 2024 for the French state to formally recognise the contribution of foreigners who died fighting the Nazi occupation when the remains of Armenian poet and fighter Missak Manouchian and his wife Melinee were moved to the country's Pantheon mausoleum of national heroes. A plaque was unveiled inside the crypt to honour twenty-three other foreign communist Resistance fighters, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish and Romanian who were rounded up and sentenced to death.⁶⁶ The full contribution of over 10,000 Spanish *guerrilleros* has yet to be officially honoured.



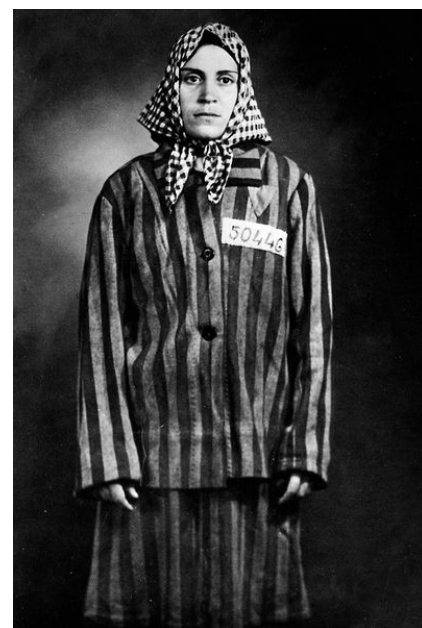
Monument to the battle of La Madeleine

Neus Català i Pallejà (6 October 1915 – 13 April 2019)

Neus Català was a member of the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) during the Spanish Civil War. She was a refugee in France following the fall of the Spanish Republic.

With her Anarchist husband Albert Roger, Neus set up a safe house for the fighters of the local Resistance, the *Maquis de Turnac* in Dordogne. She transported weapons and acted as a courier of clandestine documents, she sheltered Resistance fighters, falsified identification cards, and ran a secret printing press.

Neus and Albert were arrested in 1943 and she was deported to Ravensbrück concentration camp, thence to forced labour in Holleischen, a factory which was attached to the concentration camp of Flossenburg. There she led a group of women, called the *Comando de Gandulas* (Lazy Commando) who sabotaged production, producing bullets that would not fire. She survived until liberated by the Red Army. However, Albert was killed in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. After her release, she returned to France where she married a Spanish exile, Félix Sancho. Despite her having been the subject of gynaecological medical experiments in Ravensbrück, Neus and Félix had two children.



⁶⁶ Toni Cerda, "France Gives Foreign WWII Resistance Heroes Tardy Recognition", *Baron's* (21 February 2024)

Neus Català remained in France near Paris after the war, supporting the clandestine struggle against Francoist Spain. She chaired the *Amical de Ravensbrück* (Association of Victims of Ravensbrück). In 1978, she returned to Catalonia to live in Rubí, Barcelona. She continued her membership in the *Partit dels i les Comunistes de Catalunya* (PCC, Party of the Communists of Catalonia) until her death, still actively campaigning on social and political issues.⁶⁷

In 2015, she received the Gold Medal of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, for her struggle for justice and democratic freedom, for the memory of those deported to Nazi death camps and for the defence of human rights. In February 2019, the City of Paris awarded her the *Médaille de la Ville de Paris* (Medal of the City of Paris). A street in Paris is named in her memory. She died in 2019 aged 103.

Conclusion

Spanish Republican volunteers fought in the Resistance in France for a number of reasons. There was the question of their survival. The Nazi occupation authorities had a deep fear and loathing of all who had fought against fascism in Spain and, realising how dangerous they were, sent as many as they could lay hands on to Malhausen concentration camp where most were slaughtered. Taking to the hills was often the safer option. The Spanish Republicans had a score to settle with the Nazis, many feeling that Franco might not have won without the support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Many also felt a debt to the French volunteers in the International Brigades who had come to help them fight Franco. Given that these French International Brigade veterans were often in the front line of the Resistance in France, they formed a natural pole of attraction for their former Spanish comrades. And finally, many saw the Resistance as but a stage in their desire to reconquer Spain for a democratic republic. Sadly, many took the antifascist rhetoric of leading Allied politicians seriously and expected help in this "*Reconquista*". They were to pay heavily for this, as they discovered that Truman, Churchill and de Gaulle now supported Franco as a potential anticommunist ally in the planned Cold War.

Aside from honouring the memory of some forgotten working class heroes, their willingness to lay their sectarian differences to one side in a common struggle against fascism provides an example that the workers' movement today could profitably emulate.

⁶⁷ Neus Català, *De la resistencia y la deportación: 50 testimonios de mujeres españolas* (Barcelona: Memorial Democràtic, 2005); <https://albavolunteer.org/2019/08/neus-catala-1915-2019/>.

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Guerrilleros

**Spanish Antifascists in the
Resistance in France 1939-46**

**by
Steve Cushion**

There were many different nationalities of antifascists fighting the Nazis and their French collaborators in occupied France. The largest group were the Spanish refugees who had fled to France following the defeat of the Republic by the Nationalist forces led by Francisco Franco. Ten thousand Spanish Republicans fought in their own guerrilla brigades, many thousands more volunteered for mixed groupings of the various units of the French Resistance, others joined the Free French army in exile or the Foreign Legion. The first unit of General Leclerc's armoured division to enter Paris, was composed of Spanish Republican veterans.

Much celebrated in the localities where they fought, these foreign fighters did not fit into the post-war ideological reconstruction. They were written out of history.

The desire of many *Guerrilleros* to go back over the Pyrenees and start an uprising against the dictatorship did not fit in with the plans of US, British and French governments, who saw Franco's Spain as a potential anticommunist ally against the Soviet Union. As so often happens, yesterday's heroes become tomorrow's terrorists.

Aside from honouring the memory of some forgotten working class heroes, their willingness to lay their sectarian differences to one side in a common struggle against fascism provide an example that the workers' movement today could profitably emulate.

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